

# **REPUBLIC OF COLOMBIA COLOMBIAN NAVY**



## **CONTRIBUTION BY THE COLOMBIAN NAVY IN THE WAR AGAINST NARCOTRAFFICING**

**“Problems in the Caribbean and Pacific zones of illicit drug trafficking:  
challenges and the need for opportune solutions”**

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***“Problems in the Caribbean and Pacific zones of illicit drug trafficking: challenges and the need for opportune solutions”***

The strategy of cooperation between the Colombian Navy and the United States Maritime Forces is expressed in the Bilateral Maritime Agreement signed in 1997<sup>1</sup>. The interdiction success achieved under this Agreement has been the most successful ever obtained in joint operations against drug trafficking in the recent history of the global fight against this crime. Our collective success is evidenced by the seizure of 435,800 kilograms of cocaine between January 1997 and October 2005<sup>2</sup>. 63% of these seizures are the results of combined operations with 30.5% seized in exclusive Colombian Navy operations, and 6.5% seized in joint operations with Colombian Armed Forces<sup>3</sup>. The operational effort against this global threat has increased the average daily rate of seizure from around 51 kilos/per day in 1997, to 322.4 kilos/per day in 2005<sup>4</sup>. This impressive quantity of drugs seized in this 9-year period has an estimated bulk price in the American open market of US \$17.43 billion dollars<sup>5</sup>. Similarly, this volume is equal to approximately 2,174 million personal doses<sup>6</sup> representing a street value that exceeds USD \$65.38 billion<sup>7</sup>.

84%<sup>8</sup> of this captured volume has been the result of Colombian Navy-only maritime interdiction operations and, some combined Colombian Navy and police operations in our costal zones and on our high seas. The remaining percentage corresponds to riverine seizure operations against production centers on shore. This shows the importance of combined operations at sea in the drug war, as a very suitable tool to neutralize the illicit drug business. However, if properly resourced, we could do much more in joint and combined operations as the most cost-effective force in this fight. This is true because the cost to process the above noted amounts of coca base is approximately USD \$652.2 millions. Correspondingly, the loss that the drug traffickers will have by the seizure of equivalent quantity of cocaine in laboratories and zones of transportation on land corresponds approximately to only 6% of the loss that they incur by our seizures at sea<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Bilateral Maritime Agreement among the Government of Republic of Colombia and the Government of the United States of America to suppress illicit traffic by sea.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Naval Operations Department, Colombian Navy.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 2. facts from 2003- 2005.

<sup>4</sup> All seizure numbers are defined as of October.

<sup>5</sup> Source: information from “An analytic assessment of US drug policy” by Boyum and Reuter – 2005/ analysis from DDIN – ARC. This source estimates the value of the wholesale distribution on cocaine in USD\$ 40.000.

<sup>6</sup> Distribution price minimum per 200mg dose based upon bulk price of USD\$ 150.000/Kg.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 3. The source estimates detailed distribution of cocaine in 200 mg doses in USD\$ 150.000/Kg.

<sup>8</sup> Source: Naval Operations Department, Colombian Navy. The remaining 9% corresponds to seizure operations in the coastal shipping and storage, specially in the South Pacific areas of the Colombia.

<sup>9</sup> Source of value: facts from “An analytic Assessment of US drug Policy” by Boyum and Reuter – 2005/ and analysis of DDIN - ARC. The source estimates the price of cocaine in transit between USD\$ 15.000 and USD\$ 25.000 depending on the route taken.

Nevertheless, the estimates from intelligence organizations and agencies provided by other countries verify that this narcotics interdiction struggle in recent past years has only resulted in the seizure of approximately 13% to 15% of the total cocaine that is transported through the Caribbean and East Pacific ocean. While the majority of this cocaine departs from the Colombian coasts, an ever increasing volume of cocaine is now departing from other countries in South America<sup>10</sup>. Although the current strategy of interdiction combined with eradication of cultivation and the destruction of laboratories has been moderately successful, given the current growth rate of cultivation and processing of coca base, this strategy, continued at current resource levels, demonstrates that total elimination cannot be achieved for more than a decade. For this reason, continuing current bilateral cooperation and *increasing* patrol and interdiction capability is fundamental to our success and, an essential strategy to reduce the time that is necessary to completely eliminate this threat in the Colombian territories and its influence of maritime areas.

However, by comparison, the use of Colombian naval assets is a more financially effective use of interdiction resources in the execution of the strategy against the illicit drug traffic. Simply stated, this is true because the cost of using Colombian ships and airplanes is significantly less than using United States ships and planes in near Colombian waters due to the distance which these asset must operate from their homeports and bases and, because of the periods of time required deployed away from these bases.

Transportation by sea has become the most favored scenario for illicit drug trafficking that originates in the South American countries, destined for markets in North American, the Caribbean and in Europe. An analysis of the drug routes<sup>11</sup> estimates that the principal convergence point is Mexico where most maritime routes of illicit traffic meet. Just like Colombia is the main point of embarkation, Mexico is the main point of transit for cocaine, coming from the south of the continent moving north to enter the United States.

The magnitude of this threat constitutes a significant challenge to the capabilities of the Colombian Navy. For this reason the Colombian Navy has concentrated a substantial part of its operational, logistics, intelligence capabilities and budget in the detection and maritime interdiction of this narcoterrorist threat throughout the Colombian seas. This effort has proven to be a somewhat effective response to the asymmetric narco-terrorism threat in Colombian waters because we share maritime borders with 9 different countries in the Caribbean basin. In the crime of maritime trafficking, there are critical areas for loading and setting sail, routes of navigation and points of convergence that are well known and recurring. If we can regain domination and control of our seas, our national security and that of the region will immediately improve. It is here that all the agencies with international cooperation need to redouble the effort against narcoterrorism.

It is estimated that 70% of the global market demand for cocaine comes from Colombia<sup>12</sup> through identified maritime corridors: the "Mexican – Central America" and the "Caribbean". Nevertheless, these flows are very dynamic, hard to interdict and are determined by the behavior of different variables.

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<sup>10</sup> Different agencies present different facts about the actual production of cocaine in Colombia. The truth is that there are at least 3 variables that determine this estimate: the quantity of coca plantations, the loss in the resources, and the loss of the finished product (cocaine).

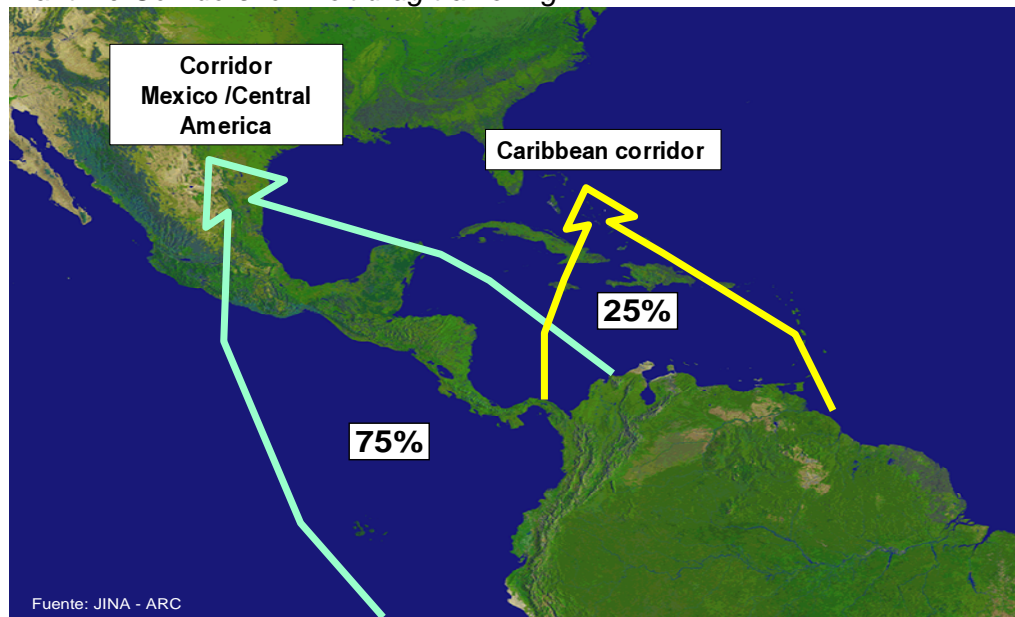
<sup>11</sup> Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcements Affairs, International Narcotics Control Agency Report, 2003, March 2004.

<sup>12</sup> US National Drug Control Strategy 2004.

The “Mexico – Central America” corridor is primarily used for illicit trafficking to reach Mexican shores. Based on valid information from the first semester of 2004, 75% of the cocaine originates in South America<sup>13</sup>. This maritime corridor is divided into two major sea routes. The first is the Western Caribbean where the traffic volume is estimated at 36% - primarily originating along the Caribbean coast of Colombia. The other half of the Mexico-CENTAM corridor is the through the Colombian East Pacific and, from Ecuadorian and Peruvian coasts. These routes lead toward Mexico, moving 70% of the shipment volume arriving in the United States across the terrestrial boundaries between Mexico and the U.S<sup>14</sup>.

In the second maritime corridor, cocaine flows from the coasts of Panama, Colombia, Venezuela and the Guyanas, toward the Antilles, with intermediate destinations in order to transfer or consolidate the drugs for further shipment - mainly to North America but, increasingly to Europe. This trafficking is estimated at 25% of the total according to valid documents from 2004 and the first semester of 2005<sup>15</sup>. According to reports, cocaine destinations are 4% toward Jamaica and the Bahamas, 6% toward Haiti and Dominican Republic; 2% toward the Virgin Islands; 2% towards the East Caribbean and minor Antilles; 1% reaches directly to the United States and a final significant percentage reaches Cuba, Puerto Rico, Central America and Europe directly.

Figure 1. *Maritime Corridors for illicit drug trafficking*



The geographical breadth of jurisdiction in Colombian waters, roughly equal territories in the Caribbean as in the Pacific, creates natural navigation routes or focal zones in these corridors. Because many of the intermediate destinations of the drugs are to countries of Central America with maritime borders, go-fast boat refueling points and load consolidation/transfer points for an estimated 60% of the traffic volume moving at sea must take place in Colombian waters. These are the main focal zones that require additional investment and fortification.

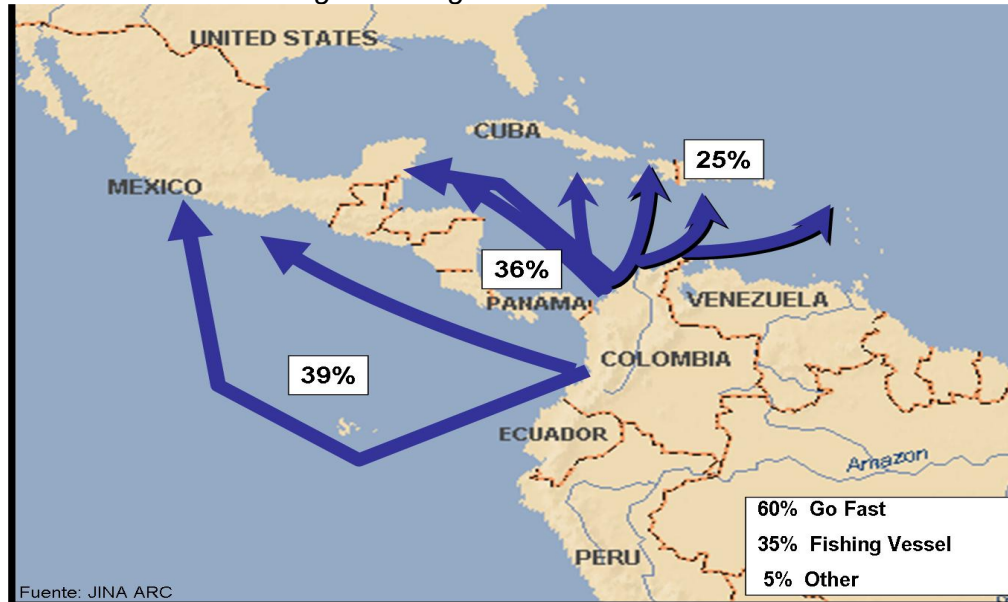
<sup>13</sup> Interagency Assessment of Cocaine Movement – (IACM), Document produced by 12 US Government agencies, enclosed South Command and JIAT-S, 2003 – Update by JINA- ARC October 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid 8.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid 10. Updated by JINA-ARC October 2005.

These specific points of opportunity are located in the Caribbean Sea in the area of the Archipelago of San Andres and Providence, in the southwestern area of Cartagena to the border with Panama and, in the northeastern area from San Marta to the Peninsula of Guajira. In the Pacific Ocean, the zones of greater influence are located from Buenaventura toward the south to the border with Ecuador, and from Bahia Solano toward the northwest. See Figure 2.

Figure 2. *Main routes for illicit drug trafficking*



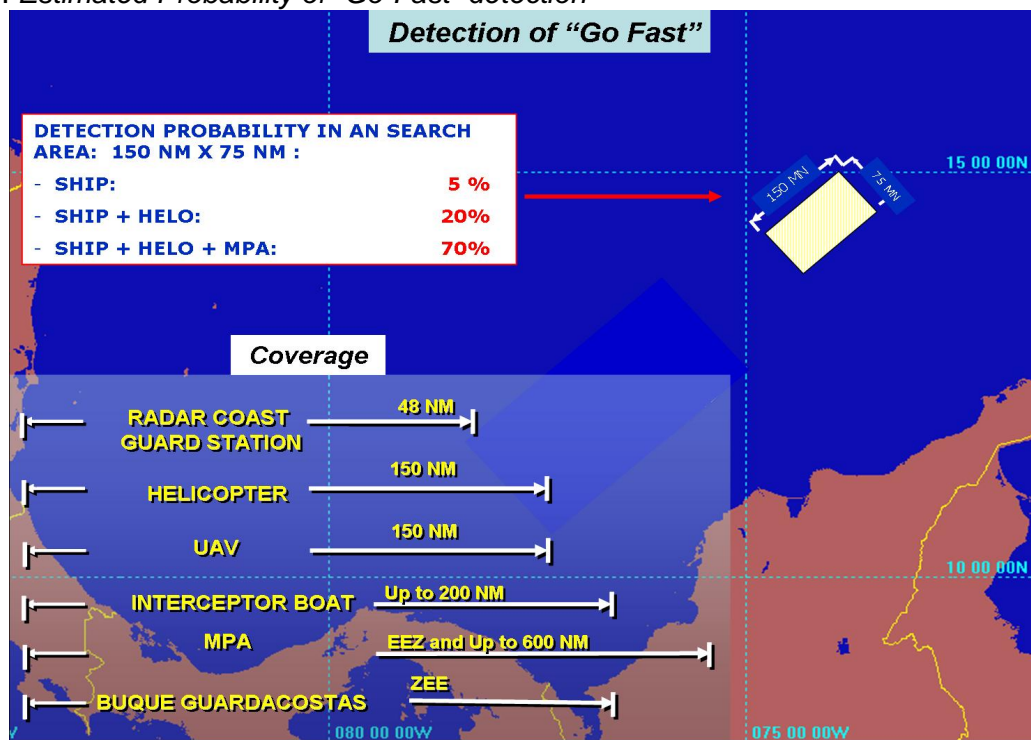
Of Colombia's 2900 Kilometers of coast, close to 50% of this coastal expanse does not have the communications infrastructure necessary to support counter-narcoterrorism operations and, prevents civil control of the territories. As a result, these coastal areas have become the territory where illicit organizations store, consolidate and ship illicit drugs, arms and laundered money. These areas are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. *Focal zones in strengthening process*



Maritime interdiction events basically evolve in three phases; intelligence, detection and interdiction or seizure. This approach works for both coastal areas and on the high seas. In the interdiction end game, detection near the coast is the most effective. However this requires maritime patrol air assets, mainly Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) and Overseas Patrol Vessels (OPV), Colombian Coastal Patrol Vessels, submarines and, surface surveillance radars located at Coast Guard Stations. Today, the coverage of radars in Coast Guard Stations in Colombia is 58%<sup>16</sup> (7 Coast Guard Stations). Detection and interdiction on the high seas is much more challenging and can only be effective when using MPA. Patrol aircraft increase the probability of detection from 5% when using only surface detection vessels to a 70% probability of detection<sup>17</sup>. Our current estimates are that the Colombian Navy has only 30% of the air detection capabilities required to cover the focal zones mentioned above - two basically outfitted CASA - 235 aircraft. Further, the second phase of an interdiction operation is much more likely to succeed if maritime patrol aircraft in the air are augmented by end-game or take-down assets such as ship launched helicopters and surface interceptor vessels. The Coast Guard of the United States has defined with clarity the procedures and need of employment of these assets to put in practice their interdiction operations strategy "New Frontier". To achieve such a strategy under the current circumstances in Colombia, the Colombian Navy will need to *increase* capabilities 74% in interceptors vessels, *grow* our helicopter capability by 75% and *increase* by 50% our oceangoing patrol vessel fleet (OPV's). Further, all of these assets are limited by maintenance and operating costs. Figure 4 details this analysis.

Figure 4. *Estimated Probability of "Go-Fast" detection*



At the moment, the Colombian Navy does not possess the necessary asset base to increase our detection capability. Further, our capability to take the detection of a potential narco target to the

<sup>16</sup> Estimate coverage does not corresponds to the total coastal area, but strategic interest points as ports.

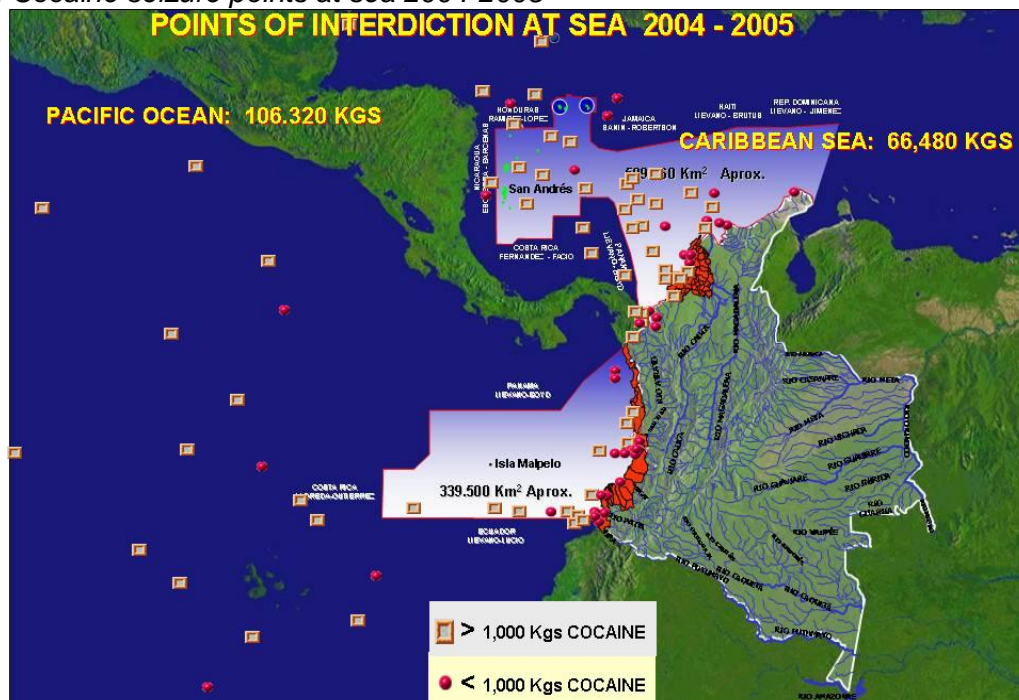
<sup>17</sup> A type MPA or 235 "casa" allows an approximate area of coverage of 24.000 MN<sup>2</sup> in 8 hours and costs approximately USD\$ 10.000 per day.



seizure point of an interdiction scenario is limited by lack of sufficient assets, as noted above. The necessary combination of assets - radar, MPA, helicopters and interceptors - is our greatest weakness interdicting drug trafficking at the sea. And, while we often have assets from the United States and occasionally from other nations participate in interdiction operations supporting Colombia, they do not possess the adequate capability mix nor quantity of assets to advance operations to a point where we are interdicting *more* northbound loads *more regularly*. The Maritime Agreement with the United States has permitted the development of exceptionally complementary employment of such assets as may be available from the Colombian Navy and the US Coast Guard. However, it is essential to increase the Colombian asset base and operational capability, as this type of investment will provide the greatest returns on a dollar-for-dollar basis. Further, increasing operations from Colombian bases in Colombian waters is certainly less expensive than operating USN and USCG vessels and aircraft for extended periods at sea away from U.S. homeports. We strongly desire to continue our close operating relationships with our U.S. counterparts. Increasing our capabilities will only reinforce the exceptional bonds which already exist between our maritime services.

Should there be a significant investment in Colombian Navy capabilities to increase *and sustain* interdiction operations at sea, we estimate that we will increase our seizures by up to 65% during the next 5 years based upon our increasing seizure averages from the past 9 years<sup>18</sup>. The impact of increased seizures at sea combined with our successful eradication and inland seizure efforts by other Colombian national forces will rapidly and significantly reduce the overall time necessary to eliminate drug production and trafficking from Colombia. Further, we will rapidly eliminate the main source of funding for the forces of terrorism in Colombia.

Figure 5. Cocaine seizure points at sea 2004-2005



An analysis of the maritime interdictions in the Pacific Ocean and in Caribbean Sea from 2003 to 2005 shown in Figure 5 above, provides a glimpse of the Colombian Navy maritime territory and

<sup>18</sup> Calculation made by Development Office – Colombian Navy, based on impact of assets acquisitions on drug seizure at sea. October 2005.

maritime borders for the confiscation of drugs at sea. The increase of confiscations in the Pacific is an important indication of a partial relocation of traffic towards our western coast, away from the Caribbean Sea routes. However, considering that combined US-CO detection and interdiction efforts are somewhat similar between both coasts, there is insufficient evidence to believe that the Pacific coast traffic is a result of greater surveillance or interdiction effort. They are however, reflective of the existing facilities and infrastructure in place on the Caribbean coast and, are key to the decision making process of the narcotics trafficking decision makers.

In the early years of interdiction efforts and before increased international responsibility for the interdiction began to become effective, the Colombian Navy was a most active participant in the interdiction effort. However, regardless of international aid received nationwide, the Navy benefited the least in terms of international investment in improved capabilities and infrastructure. Surprisingly, despite the lack of other-than-national investment, the Colombian Navy has been the most successful organization in the coastal and maritime interdiction of cocaine, heroin, marijuana and war related materials traffic. Further, the Colombian Navy has been a key leader in the Caribbean basin, working closely with the international community and with neighboring nations.

The interdiction results by the Colombian Navy are evident as are our continued and increasing work with the international community. In the past three years, the Navy has benefited from slightly increasing investments from abroad - *especially* from the United States. But, there is more work to be done to improve and increase our interdiction capabilities. Specifically, we must improve our maintenance and modernization efforts linked to our existing Coast Guard assets and infrastructure. We must invest in more, and more modern maritime air and sea patrol assets. We also need to improve the training and outfitting of our personnel and we need greater opportunity to achieve interoperability with other navies and to gather actionable intelligence.

Before we can defeat the narco-terrorist, the short term needs of the Colombia Navy are relatively simple and rapidly achievable. First, we need to strengthen our capabilities by the acquisition of Maritime Patrol Airplanes (4), Medium Naval Helicopters(8), Interceptors Boats (28), Oceanic (4) and Coastal patrols vessels (4), and the construction of Coast Guard Stations at San Andres/Providencia, Covenas and at Bahia Solano in the Pacific. Secondly, we must invest in improving our capabilities to gather and act upon intelligence - our own and that provided by others. Thirdly, we must invest in the training of our frontline sailors, guardsmen and marines. And, finally, we must invest in increasing international combined operations and training exercises.

Without a doubt, the operational effort of the Colombia Navy over the past several years has surpassed capabilities of any another naval force with similar restricted resources. In spite of the threats, the physical wounds and death that our sailors, guardsmen and marines receive from narcoterrorists and their organizations, our Navy demonstrates daily its undeniable commitment to the eradication of drugs, other illicit substances and organizations from our seas and rivers. Our daily effort results in removing one kilogram of cocaine from circulation, every four minutes, every day. With modest investment as detailed above, this success rate will surely and rapidly increase.

Thank-you for this opportunity to provide you with this statement.